

Sakshi-Bhav

The Presents of Presence

A Personal Journey of Role-Transformation at Aadi

By

Sonal Kothari

Paper submitted to

Psychodrama in India (PiI)

Towards Associate Directorship

Acknowledgements

There are so many who have contributed to who I am and where I have arrived in the writing of this paper. My sincerest gratitude and acknowledgment to them all, who are too many to name and remember even. And then there are those who shall be named 😊.

I want to begin by thanking Roohdaar. You believed in me when I did not. You held me accountable gently, steadily, firmly without ever pushing, shoving or shaming. You mirror my good parts for me to see. You challenge me with humor and that playful kind smile. You have given me the gift of taking my time and doing it my way. I could say, that you have more than most, nursed me into wellness and wholeness. You walk the talk. You embody what you preach. And through your living an authentic life, I receive permissions to do the same. Your generosity of spirit knows no bounds. I am blessed to know you in all the ways I do. शत् शत् नमन (*Shatshat naman*), my deepest respect and gratitude.

To my two bubs NP and RAP, I absolutely love being your mother. You two are the reason I strive for the good and beautiful things in me and my life. You have challenged me, inspired me and loved me into being better and better versions of myself. This piece of writing I dedicate to you both. Thank you, my loves.

BRP, half a lifetime of togetherness and learning; not always pleasant, but necessary for our Souls' journeys. For that my deepest gratitude.

SRG, I could not ask for a more supportive, fun companion, partner, friend or lover.

Amaya, Toffy and Lee you are my home.

To my support staff HanumanthAppa, Gowri and Ashok, life has ease because of your contributions.

My ancestors and my lineage. Deep gratitude to my parents Jyoti & Jeewan and grandparents; life comes through you and your immense blessings. My siblings SK and VKM. You who have stood by me and championed me always. My nieces and nephew may you continue to bloom and grow. My tribe: Fatema, Janet, Juhie, Reena, Aakanksha, Mitul: all things are made better and possible with your presence. My clients for the privilege of companioning you on your journeys- for the shared joys, the trials, tribulations and triumphs. For all the learning and for the trust placed in me, I am grateful.

To Mother Earth and to Father Sky.

To the Ultimate Truth that I sometimes call God. I am grateful.

Contents

Title page	
Acknowledgements	2
Contents Page	3
Introduction	4
Part A: Warm up	5
Part B: Dramas on the Stage of Life	9
i) Cultural Conserves	12
ii) Updating the Intra-psychic Atom	16
iii) Role Expansion	21
Part C: Catharsis of Integration	25
Conclusion	28
Bibliography	30

Introduction

Through the 8 days that I was in Ahmedabad for the First Psychodrama Conference in India called “Aadi; a New Beginning” in January 2025, I saw significant role confirmation happen for me. This paper is a self-study and self-reflection piece of my process and growth.

PART A of the paper begins with setting the stage, describing the warm up that had been there within me for some time leading up to the conference. This warmup allowed me to be present to and aware of my somatic and psychological processes in the context of my experiences at the conference. Being mindful i.e., observing myself, others and the situation led to the clear seeing of old patterns and led to growth and autonomy described in Part B.

PART B of the paper looks at three different areas in which role development happened for me. The first of which has to do with some of the cultural conserves that I inherited as a young woman growing up in the North of India with regard to how I view men from that region. The second part looks at the attachment pattern to my mother in relation to Roohdaar as a nurturing and steady parent figure in my life. And the third part has to do with how being supported by my mentors and peers allowed me to authentically and vulnerably stand in a public forum and deliver a vote of thanks.

PART C, the third aspect of the paper explores my relationship with and to community in general. In the writing of this piece, I became aware of the isolation I have lived in and the gifts and costs thereof. I explore how observation allowed me to lean in, ask for support and then receive that support from the Pil fraternity. These provided corrective experiences at every stage helping to shift roles from frozen or stuck to progressive and positive and how that experience felt in my somatic roles.

Finally in the conclusion I summarize the process of integration and share how that has impacted my life today. I discuss *Sakshi Bhav* and how it relates to psychodrama and life.

In the Tables, the **retrogressive roles are in red**, the **progressive in green**. These are all intrapsychic roles. The roles in **blue are interpersonal roles**.

Part A: Warm up

Tilling of the Soil and Planting the Seeds

Preparing the Psyche

The Fallow Land

I had been agitating in the days and weeks building up to the conference. Some of the questions that I was spinning were; do I have the right clothes? What is the right look for a conference such as this? Will I know enough and be smart enough in terms of psychodramatic knowledge? Will I be able to speak well at the felicitation ceremony which I was co-anchoring? Will I be able to interact with all these people – colleagues, trainers and mentors, friends, stalwarts in the field? Essentially, am I enough?



Fig 1: **Fallow land**: wide open field, cracked, barren, sometimes lush but uncultivated. In real life appearing as restless, strange emptiness after achievement. She cannot be forced to bloom. In the psyche she comes to life not from effort but from permission to be and by being honored and seen.

These retrogressive roles were both familiar and over-developed. The dyad, since roles only show up in pairs, are various permutations and combinations of two roles clusters. One

cluster is that of the critical, judgy or mocking parent voice trying to protect the child from outside disappointment by ship-shaping her up. The other role cluster is that of the fearful, harassed adapted child. The details of the various roles are given in the Table below. The column headings are inspired by Dr. Herb Propper's short write up on Roles and Roohdaar's supervision.

Table 1: This table describes intrapsychic role clusters that are retrogressive and over developed over a long period of time

Name of Role Cluster: Critical, Judge-y or Mocking Parental voice

Overall Objective: To protect themselves from their own fears, shame-experience and lack of confidence in themselves by shaping the child into the "perfect version".

Tactics: To judge, shame, criticize and overall bully the child by constantly speaking at her and micromanaging her every move

Complimentary Role Cluster: The adapted child roles, that adopt various strategies to meaning-make and survive the parental manipulations.

Name of Role	Objective of Role	Tactics of the Role	Complimentary Role	Response of the Role
The Fault-Finding Parent Voice	To offload their fears and take care of their own distress	Criticizing the child or correcting them or advising the child	The "trying to do their best" child	To keep making effort to improve, provide what the parent wants, to anticipate what the parent wants and try to do that
The Shaming Parent Voice	To correct the child by shaming them into obedience	Reminding child of how they are, lazy, not hard working enough, not good enough etc.	The Somatic frozen "I'm bad and all wrong child"	This child is terror frozen, shamed, exposed, She has no recourse or relief. Physically child gets headaches, clamps jaws, eyes are wide with fear and shoulders are hurting from muscles held tight.

The Micromanager	To micromanage every action in order to control outcomes	Nagging, constantly speaking, not letting the child alone for a moment	The Harassed and Hassled Child	Using passive aggressive ways to get back at the parent, Working only enough to get parent off their back. Somatically the body is tense and angry at parent
The Reminder of Past Faults	To help the child not repeat past mistakes	To read out the laundry list of past transgressions, mistakes and is shame inducing	The “Never can do right Child” or “You don’t stand a chance Child”	To be stubborn and withdrawn and freeze on any doing because what’s the point.
The Sneaky Interlocutor	To soften the child for the other roles	To say something apparently nice that opens the child to receiving from the other roles	The Wary hypervigilant Child that lacks trust.	The child is preparing for final attack that will follow the praise and is hypervigilant, hyperalert and untrusting and wary of the world

Thus, the initial part of the experience I had was an intra-psychic process that was as old as I was. The critical roles of self are borrowed voices from the adult figures of my childhood that I have made my own and honed to perfection over the period of my lifetime. The distress experienced by my inner child¹ is always palpable and experienced somatically in the body as worry headaches, sinus issues, clamping of jaws, grinding of teeth, neck and shoulder pain, anxiety, sleeplessness and so on. And the child has no sense of adequacy and is disempowered and distraught and as such my overall experience is that I am out of touch with my resourcefulness. These roles were fixed and retrogressive.

¹ Inner child is that younger self role of me, that was experiencing distress and a term from the co-dependency model

The Tilling of the Soil and Planting the Seeds



Fig 2: **Tilling the soil and planting the seed:** in the psyche tilling the soil is working through what lies beneath; memories, old patterns and that which is unattended to. Planting seeds are intensions and new beliefs that can take root in the ground of inner readiness.

A week before leaving for the conference I was grumbling to my partner about my inner cacophony. He listened patiently and when I stopped speaking, he simply said, “You have to do nothing (at the conference) but observe”. The relief I experienced was immediate. Since he is a potent figure in my life, I was able to readily accept this as a possibility. The role he played in this moment was that of “The Wise Understanding Parent”. The Table below gives the role relationship.

Table 2: This table describes the inter-personal role relationship that was the turning point in my psyche, that led to the establishment of the clear seer role cluster. Everything else followed this.

Name of Role	Objective of Role	Tactics of the Role	Complimentary Role	Response of the Role
Wise Understanding Parent	Give permission to the child “it’s okay to do nothing and it is okay to be you. And you are okay as you are”	To listen well, to speak wisely, timely and speak less. Find the right moment to deliver the permissions.	The Wise Adult in me Frozen child	Understood value of what was being given. Took permission when provided and stepped up into her power. Relaxed as other roles stepped up

Part B: The Dramas on the Stage of Life

Caring for the Crop in the Field

The Presents of Presence: witnessing patterns of rupture and making repair

Deepening the Warm-Up

With the arrival of the permission to “observe” and “do nothing”, the Clear-seer roles got established. The warring voices of the retrogressive parent-child cluster in my head faded into the background. A portal of sorts had opened up. A whole host of developing and developed roles emerged onto the stage. Like sentinels they took their places, making me feel safe within myself and without in the world. Some of these roles are described in the table below. These roles remained with me for the next many weeks - including the entirety of my trip to Ahmedabad and throughout the conference.

Table 3: This table describes the Positive Progressive and Developed Roles that emerged following the permission to do nothing and observe. I call these roles collectively “the Sentinels” for the rest of the write up.

Name of Role	Objective of Role	Tactics of the Role	Complimentary Role	Response of the Role
It's okay to be yourself	Give permissions to be myself and be okay with myself however i am To be kind and caring, To be gentle	It's okay to dress how you feel comfortable, It's okay to speak or not speak To avoid judging the child and seek to be understanding	a) The Wise Adult role within me. b) Receding “People Pleaser Role”	To not prejudge a situation, myself or others. To act from a place of knowing within and without. Have possibility of doing or not doing. The permission to be myself, allowed the PP role to step back and relax.

It's okay to not do	To disentangle acceptance, belonging and safety from performance To not judge To be kind and connecting, even curious	It's okay to not move, it's okay to sit It's okay to just listen It's ok to relax you're fine as you are.	People Pleaser Role who manages safety by over-adapted doing	To take a back-seat and not compulsively do and act
Clear-seer of Self	To be in touch with my inner world in all aspects To be curious To be kind To be gentle	To notice feelings, needs, thoughts, bodily sensations and impulses	The self - my emotional body, my physical body and mental body	To just be themselves without moderating or changing anything
Clear-seer of Others	To not react but see the other with clear eyes To be curious To be accepting	To listen well, see well and think well of others. "Well" is not always positive, but is "as is" in the moment.	The " <i>accha baccha</i> " - the good girl. The one that is settled in her being and knows she is safe, loved and seen	Watching and observing, listening with attention, thinking wisely without escalating and feeling her feelings
Clear-seer of the Situation	To notice the interpersonal dynamics and the unfolding of events without reacting To be curious To be okay with what is	Not rescue, be patient, let things play out, Allow situation to be what it is	The Observing Curious Child, who watches everything The Hyper Vigilant child who is constantly anxious	To watch with curiosity how things play out without feeling obligated to intervene in any way. To meaning make and see patterns emerging without judging. To relax and not be on high alert. To recede into the background and rest

These roles under whose watchful, supportive and kind eyes many unconscious patterns became visible, led to the work that is described in this section of the write up. These roles
 Paper submitted to Psychodrama in India (Pil) toward Associate Directorship

or role cluster I will call **the sentinels** in the rest of the write up. The three areas, examples or experiences I share here are

- i. Challenging cultural conserves around men from North India
- ii. Further Individuation from Internal All Powerful Mother Figure
- iii. Speak publicly with Vulnerability and Authenticity

Part B i: Cultural Conserves

Pulling the Weeds

Self-limiting beliefs, cognitive distortions and the cost of conforming

vs

the contentment in connections when limiting beliefs are confronted.



Fig 3: **Pulling weeds:** removing unhealthy patterns that no longer serve. Uprooting old fears, judgements, inherited beliefs that limit us. It clears space for healthier thoughts, feelings and behaviors, attitude and a better experience with people and life overall.

One of the patterns that surfaced for me that I want to share with you first was that of cultural conserves I discovered I had around men and men from the North of India in particular. I share two incidents that highlight two aspects of this conserve.

On the evening of the second day of the conference, I was seeking support for transport for one of our foreign guests I was tasked with shadowing. They wanted to do some shopping on the way back to the airport the next evening. This being a new city, I was not familiar with the options and possibilities for this request. I sought support from a dear friend and colleague, a competent, supportive and helpful young man, who immediately began a conversation to resolve the issue with another competent, supportive and helpful young man who was in charge of transport.

It had been a long few days, and we were all tired. As the conversation progressed and immediate resolution was not at hand around the clothes store of choice, I found myself snap and say in a sharp and judgmental tone – “*you men are useless, tumse nahi hoga*” (you can’t get anything done) and I turned to a young woman who also a volunteer at the conference to ask about clothes stores for men.

The first young man immediately called me out – “arre, I am helping na!”. I was mortified. At this point, the normal pattern for me would have been for the parent-child clusters (Table 1) to run a riot in my head. However, with the sentinels firmly in place, the work of self-reflection or gentle probing of the situation began. “Why did I snap? Where did that come from? What my friend/colleague had said was absolutely true – that he was trying to help and sort this out for me and the guest, then why the impatience? This is not normally how you behave, what is playing out here?”

The gentle questioning unearthed a cultural conserve, an unconscious belief system about North Indian men. That men are like children; they could not be trusted to take care of themselves. They are all talk and no work, certainly no help around anything domestic – especially as related to things like buying clothes, even for themselves. I had both heard and observed this growing up. My aunts and women around me did the clothes shopping for their spouses, boys and the men in their lives.

I realized I was on auto-pilot, I apologized to my friend and colleague, the conversation concluded shortly thereafter with a good resolution for all.

In a second incident I unconsciously profiled a colleague of mine, again a man from the North of India. I had him pegged as an ambitious go-getter who would do anything to get a seat at the table - saam, daam, dand, bhed (by hook or by crook). In a conversation someone mentioned that they had always thought of this man as honest and direct. That made me reflect upon my view of him. I realized that my actual lived experience of him was anything but what I was thinking. He had been generous, kind and supportive throughout my very difficult process of arriving at a good-enough place to do the final honors at the facilitation ceremony. His inputs had been wise and his manner always respectful and playful even. I had felt steadied and supported by these interactions – there had been warmth and care in his presence. Something that I had been grateful for.

While I never had a conversation with this colleague, I updated my very warped internal bias or cultural conserve about North Indian Men. It was freeing. I could be less vigilant and could drop my ever-present background irritation and battle-readiness with north Indian men. And I can even on occasion extend this to Indian men and then to men in general. I can interact with men (no qualifier necessary), in the here and now and enjoy aspects of their company and presence that previously was beyond me.

Table 4: This table describes the roles that emerged from observing the cultural conserves around men of North India. The table covers retrogressive and progressive roles both in the two incidences that I have covered in the section above.

Name of Role	Objective of Role	Tactics of the Role	Complimentary Role	Response of the Role
Judger of Men of North-India	To protect myself from disappointment, harm or worse	To pre-judge the situation To not have expectations of support or help To think of men as children who cannot be relied upon	Hypervigilant Child and Hypervigilant Young Woman	To take matters into my own hands; to-do it myself Seek support from other spaces or people To be very vigilant and not drop my guard at any point of time for any reason

The Gentle non-judgmental fact-seeker Or Challenger of opinions held as fact.	To probe what is going on. To be non-judgmental as I seek the truth To be gentle and kind	Ask questions. Not judge Probe gently Look up the facts Be in the here and now	The Observing Curious Child The Spontaneous Playful Child The Retiring Judger of Men of North India	To watch with curiosity how people really are To be free to respond in the here and now To retire into the background. To relax vigilance
The Wise One	Challenge limiting beliefs or cultural conserves when they arise As well as to make appropriate boundaries when needed	To remind me that everyone in a group or category are not the same To invite me into seeing people for who they are in the here and now while holding the bias lightly	The Observing Curious Child (or maturing adult or present self) The Spontaneous Playful Child	To watch with curiosity how people really are To be free to enjoy people's company in the here and now
The open-minded meet-er of people	To see a person clearly in here and now	To not allow the conserves to cloud seeing a person clearly for who they are and are not Be spontaneous To enjoy people To not be worried and anxious	<i>Other People</i>	-
The Apologizer	To make repair in the relational rupture	To admit to the mistake or mis-step done. To say sorry and apologize To seek repair	<i>The other person whom I had wronged or hurt</i>	-

Because of the presence of the sentinels, I was able to see how deep the conditioning ran. Without this realization, even in the face of facts, my understanding as well as my experience was tailored by my beliefs (the conserves).

Part B ii: Updating the Intra-psychic Social Atom

Separating from the Scaffold

Further Individuation from Mom

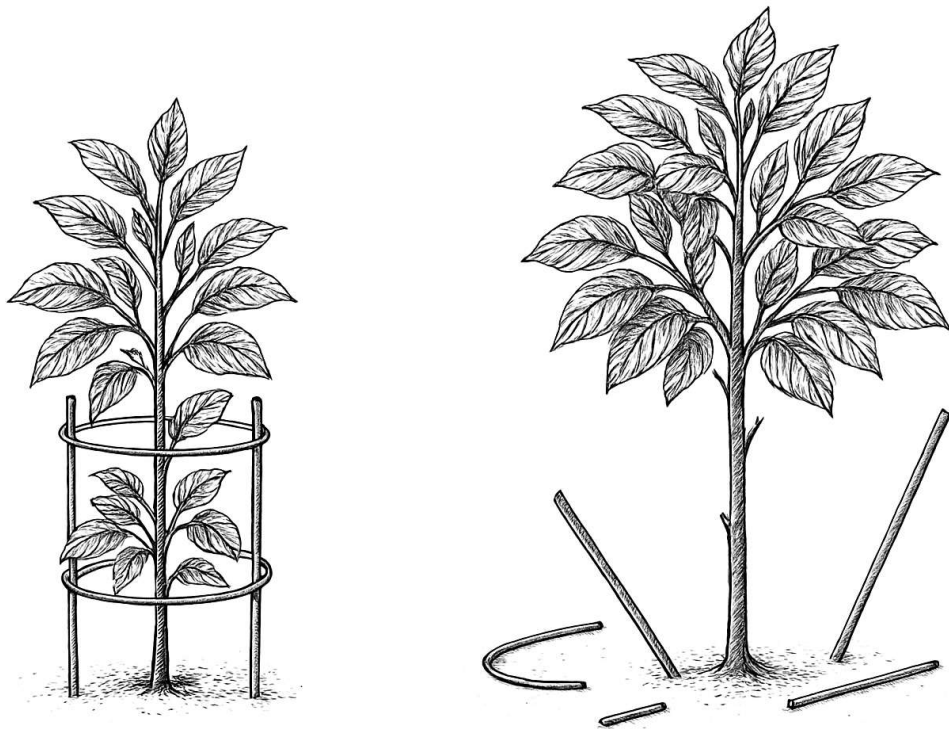


Fig 4: **Separating from the Scaffold:** letting go of internalized authority and borrowed structures parental, familial and societal that once offered support but now limit growth. To begin to stand on your own recognizance.

Over the years my supervisor and I have, and continue to share many overt role-relationships; co-trainees, colleagues, friends, mentor-mentee, supervisor-supervisee, trainer-trainee. For the most part we have moved seamlessly between roles without having to cut off parts of ourselves in order to conform to the needs of a particular role-relationship. Maintaining appropriate healthy boundaries has helped us make this successful relationally. To be fully myself with another being who is also fully herself has been a wholesome and reparative experience for me.

One of the covert role relationships that I had not been particularly aware of till this conference was that of mother and child. In psychotherapy we might call it transference and counter transference. While I have experienced my mentor as nurturing and structuring for me, I had not been fully aware of the projections of my own mother by me onto her. My own relationship with my mother is a difficult one for me and for my mother. And then there is the internalized mother I carry.

On the day after I arrived in Ahmedabad, there was a pooja (Prayer) held in the morning the day before the conference. I got up leisurely and had a slow morning (a thing I never do especially in another's home), a permission I had received to take it easy from my mentor. By and by I got ready and went downstairs to sit for the Pooja. I was already feeling guilt for not helping out with the preparations as I walked in on my mentor's raised voice. She was upset/talking with a colleague for/about some task not done as per their agreement.

I did not recognize it then, but I instantly went into hypervigilance, a trained response from my childhood. To this role the room was a minefield that needed to be navigated with utmost care. This was the day before the conference and the culmination of one year's worth of work. Anticipation, flurry of activities and feelings were running high. I could see that our colleague was overcome with emotion. While I related with my mentor, I empathized with my colleague more. I was judging "my mother" for not being understanding. I was also judging myself severely now for not being okay with her behavior and thus being disloyal. We were both not okay. From then onwards, I felt distant from my mentor – again a realization I had in retrospect.

The familiarity I had with my mentor was not there, I was not sure of my place and I was not confident of stepping up to her in the way I would normally do. Seeing her angry and my own guilt in judging her, and then going behind her back in empathizing with our colleague, foreclosed that possibility for me.

Table 5: Describes all the retrogressive as well as progressive roles that developed during my interaction with my mentor within the sphere of transference and projection by me onto her of my mother.

Name of Role	Objective of Role	Tactics of the Role	Complimentary Role	Response of the Role
Hypervigilant Child	To watch out for any psychological, verbal or non-verbal flying debris, missiles or stray rockets	Ensure that absolutely nothing gets past her notice. To pass on data to other roles who then use fawn response, withdrawal or other tactics to mitigate danger	The other person or persons and situation at hand.	-
Bad girl for disagreeing with Mother	To ensure power dynamic between mother and her is intact. To be separate from mother, the price is the label of being Bad	Being passive aggressive with Mother Experiencing Shame Not feeling confirmed in her separateness	The other person on whom the mother role is being projected	-
Frozen "Angry with Mother" child Role	Being angry, rageful even towards mother for not being seen or validated as she desires	To resent mother while not really expressing it out loud. Holding grudges and resentments Not addressing the issues at hand	The other person on whom the mother role is being projected	-
Frozen scared and/or guilty child role	To live in guilt and fear as an alternative to doing something about the status quo, not challenging self, situation or other.	Feel helpless or powerless Feel guilty for feeling these feelings and not doing anything Looping thoughts Feeling shame for the feelings felt as well as intensity of them Fearful of retribution.	The other person on whom the mother role is being projected	-

Imaginer of All Things that Could Go Wrong	Imagining everything that could go wrong as an insurance against them actually happening. Not to get caught off-guard -ever.	Making up multiple worst- case scenarios Spinning stories of all that could go wrong and mentally and physically being prepared for any eventuality	The Hypervigilant Child role	This role feeds the data gathered as fodder for preparation in case of any eventuality
"I am my Own and Primary Responsibility"	To orient to self as the primary response. To tune into the self-first, above and before others or situation	As soon as discomfort is felt in the psyche or body to orient to self. Ask questions like what's going on? How do you feel? What do you need?	The other person or persons and situation at hand that triggers discomfort. Other parts of self who trigger discomfort	- Parts who shame, blame or otherwise dump on the child -making her feel not okay
Validator of my Own self: my experiences, feelings, thoughts and opinions Or Comforter of Child in Distress	To attune to the hurting self, to validate feelings, thoughts and opinions. Calm the child so that psychic energy be freed up so that other positive roles can come up	Attune to self Active listen Respond, validate and make room for holding big feelings and emotions	Parts of self who are hurting.	To feel seen, heard, validated and calmed
People are fine as they are.	To let people be. To drop expectations and judgments that tie me up into psychological pretzels	To drop expectations To drop judgments To read, listen to and think about the meta view rather than a transactional view.	The other person or persons and situation at hand The clear seer role cluster	- To see clearly as things are

Thanks to the sentinels, as I observed myself, others and the situation, I realized that my mentor was not my mother and my scared child was not the adult me that was in relationship

with her. Through observation I could separate the archaic fears of my child that were triggered by my witnessing her upset from the here and now appropriateness of her response and invoke other positive role clusters. Then slowly through self-observation and self-reflection, talk myself back to the here and now reality. To my child I said, mom can be angry and mom and I can have different points of views, I will not disintegrate for it. Result was confirmation in myself.

The role to develop through this experience was that of the *validator of self and validator of my experience*. My feelings and thoughts are valid – separate from the other. My feelings matter and it is my responsibility first and foremost to take care of myself. My thoughts and feelings can be different from the other (my mother) and I can be okay and she can be okay too. Many apparently contradicting things can be okay at the same time in the same space.

Most important development therefore during this time was that of individuation – I can be me, have my own thoughts, feelings and actions and I am not wrong to do so rather it is my right and responsibility to be so.

Subsection B iii: Role Expansion

The Harvest Bears Fruit and we all can sit down for a meal

Inter-dependence for a more enriching and wholesome human experience



Fig 5: **Bearing Fruit:** meaningful outcomes after a period of inner work are visible to others. It is like the fruit that is shared with your family and community. Outcomes of inner growth and wisdom are witnessed by and impact people in your circles of influence.

I had been tasked with the role of co-anchoring the felicitation ceremony on the last evening of the conference. This was a huge honor for me. I was excited and gung-ho about it, but struggled for weeks to write about the people I was to felicitate and honor for their contributions to Psychodrama within India. There were two aspects to this, one was the public speaker role and the other role was to speak from a place of authenticity about them. It was this second role that was not aligning. I wrote and rewrote. The day of the conference arrived, my co-anchor had his speeches down perfectly and they were beautiful. I was glad, but it made the contrast even more difficult for me.

The roles that were in play for me were a role cluster – I had been skeptical of several of these people in the past for various reasons that still feel valid today. I could not align with praising them now. The role was *two-faced person*, a variation of the “*guilty for judging mother*” role from the previous section. It was hard to share with anyone my internal struggle and split. I could not find the words to share the shame I felt for thinking like this.

It was my trainer on the day before the ceremony who asked me late at night as I sat with her crying – overwhelmed helpless child role – what is it Sonal that is bothering you? I could see how tired she was, and I was aware that she need not have attended to me. But the kindness and concern in spite of her exhaustion touched the part of me that was aching. I was able to share my dissonance.

She reminded me that every one of these people had achieved a lot and that in their own journeys were accomplished and this was something that I both knew and could authentically get myself behind. In a very round-about way, what I heard and was able to do was put into perspective the fact that “this wasn’t about me” and my feelings and opinions or of what I had supposedly done or not done - “getting out of my own way” role. This wasn’t about me at all.

I was then able to access the role of “giver of authentic strokes”, a well-developed role in me and wrote down speeches honoring each stalwart from a heartfelt place within me.

Delivering the speech was another area of role development for me. I was so nervous as I took the stage and held the mike that my voice was shaking. I said as much to the gathering - that I was nervous and that the nerves would steady as I went along.

My mentor then spoke up on my behalf, inviting everyone to support this developing role of public speaker within me. The room spontaneously erupted into loud clapping and cheers. I was both surprised and overcome with warmth. I allowed myself to take in the support I was receiving - a newer role. From there onwards, I felt like I belonged. That no matter how I did, I was accepted. This allowed me to speak more confidently and celebrate with joy and warmth each person and their contributions to Psychodrama within India. I received strokes after the ceremony was over as several people came up and spoke to me.

Table 6: describes the progressive and retrogressive roles that emerged during the public speaking and felicitation writing processes.

Name of Role	Objective of Role	Tactics of the Role	Complimentary Role	Response of the Role
Enthusiastic, feeling honoured Co-anchor	To honor and felicitate the guests with warmth and accuracy	Write good speeches Accurately depict their contributions Add a personal touch Be authentic	The members being felicitated The audience and attendees at the conference.	-
Two faced-person	To stop me from writing the speeches by pointing out the dissonance in how I was and what I was tasked with doing	Calling out the apparent deceit/dichotomy Questioning authenticity Shaming	The co-anchor role	To get subdued Loose power to write Feel shamed and small To despair
Seeker of support	To know that this could not be done alone and help was needed and to reach out for support	To share the distress being experienced. To ask for support To receive support	My mentor and supervisor	Warmly and with care explore the difficulty and psycho-educate

Giver of authentic strokes	To warmly and authentically write a speech honoring people who had contributed to psychodrama within India	Be honest be warm be personal be humorous Be sincere to self and to the honorees and to the audience	The writer role	Write a warm, honest personal and funny account honoring each member I was to speak about.
Holder- backer in order to protect	To prevent an embarrassment and fiasco	To freeze To criticize and question ability To shut down other positive voices	Scaredy public speaker	To hold back To voice shake To not feel confident i.e. be diffident/nervous To feel physically ill

Subsection C: Catharsis of Integration

The Wood-Wide-Web:

Anchoring Roots in Community: We are social creatures, we thrive in community



Figure 6: **The Wood Wide Web:** The metaphor illustrates how the underground mycorrhizal networks in forests, called the “wood wide web”—mirror the invisible yet vital connections in human communities. Just as trees communicate and share nutrients, warnings, and support through fungal and root networks, people thrive not through isolated strength but through *inter-being*: a web of care, attention, and reciprocity keeping us healthy and protected through thick and thin.

If my warm up started with the arrival of the sentinels, what kept the warm-up alive through the whole of Aadi was the role of community in the presence of the sentinels. This was an observation that my mentor and I made as we discussed the first draft of my associate director paper.

In groups I usually drift towards well developed care-er roles; provider of support, aligner with the least accepted group member, assistant to the leader of the group (in overt and covert ways) especially if I like them. I extend myself to group members for emotional support, listening, cheering them on, mirroring and empathizing. I pitch in and help where I can. All of these are well-developed roles for me personally as well as professionally. In groups I tend to be appreciated for my academic prowess and for my empathic connecting.

So, for any onlooker it would be fair to assume that I am well integrated into the group. While this may be apparently so, the reality is that I keep myself separate from the group by not crossing certain invisible lines and letting others know in unspoken ways, “not beyond this point.” That point I realized in the writing of this section, is the point beyond which, others can possibly extend themselves back to me, where I can be at the receiving end of the same care and consideration, I offer others. While I will give generously, as much as I can, within my capacity at any given point, (and I have become more boundaried and mindful with the giving over the years), I understood that I don’t allow myself to receive or people to come into my inner space.

The well-developed role of group member is imbalanced. A role that has been shaped by caution, mistrust, and past experiences of exclusion and/or shame. This role’s tactics is to protect or vaccinate myself from isolation within the group and ensure that I am not disliked or ridiculed by being of service to others. However, to receive care i.e., let others be in control of giving is fraught with anxiety. It is too scary to not be in control and too painful when I am let down. To ask for support not knowing if I will receive it or not, is quite out of the question.

This role, though protective, constrains my access to receiving while maximizing giving. Thus, my experience in groups has been less than wholesome, making me tired, stressed and always needing to leave as soon as the group activity ends.

During the conference due to the presence of the sentinels, I noticed I was more relaxed because I was less anxious and judgy overall - of self, other and situation. I enjoyed people’s company more. Asked for help and support when I needed it. Accepted it when it came - it

always did. Didn't judge myself or scold myself for asking, receiving or enjoying the reciprocity. I was already doing less and that helped create space for being held by others.

By doing less giving and by receiving more freely and fully, a kind of balance of give and take was experienced by me that felt wholesome and made me feel *well* in my being, like being embraced in a warm hug. I felt less anxious and more trusting and relaxed in general. I had fun. I find myself laughing a lot more and there was spontaneity and an embodied quality to it.

I have a quiet knowing that I will be fine, things would be taken care of and I will be held. That I did not need to do it all myself and keep it together all on my own.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I could simply say – I am grateful for the gifts of '*presence*'.

In the spiritual and philosophical traditions of my land, like Vedanta, Samkhya, Yog among others, this presence is called *Sakshi-Bhav*. A Sanskrit phrase that literally translates to *Sakshi* = witness and *Bhav* = attitude. Together they mean 'witness consciousness' or 'witness attitude'.

The Sentinels I refer to in the beginning of this paper represent the working of *Sakshi-Bhav*. In the writing of this piece, I am reminded time and time again of the many invitations into *Sakshi-Bhav* since a young age. They have been differently called: meditation, self-observation, mindfulness, slowing down, taking a pause, taking a break, speaking less listening more ... The fallow land cannot be forced to bloom, she has her own timing and rhythm. The seeds sown over a lifetime bloomed when the timing was right.

Even within psychodrama, the mirror position or the simple act of concretization embodies *Sakshi-Bhav*, allowing the protagonist to step outside of habitual roles, creating possibility of insight, choice and healing. It feels to me like *Sakshi-Bhav* may well be the cornerstone of the psychodramatic process too.

As I conclude this paper, I share some of the concrete outcomes of my journey.

In the months since the conference, I remind myself that conserves run deep. I have noticed I have conserves around many people including myself and many situations. I remind myself to see people, myself and situations as they are – like a wide-eyed child. I remind myself not to assume the worst or the best of people. Whole new worlds open up in the simple act of being curious. I notice how I'm more relaxed in public spaces and in new situations.

Another outcome of this work was that my parents and I were able to for the first time in 50 years (or so it seemed) be in a very difficult conversation about our own pain and be vulnerable and share and listen to each other. This happened the day after I returned home from the conference.

A third outcome is, that I pro-actively lean in, ask for support, receive care and seek out connection to meet my psychological needs. I assume that I will be met and my needs will be tended to. Knowing that I am held, has done magic for my nervous system.

Fourthly, I continue to be more autonomous in other areas of my life, reacting less and responding more or not at all. What others think and feel influences me less and what I think and feel is more central to my decision making and thinking and feeling processes. I find myself able to make boundaries in areas where I struggled before and make better decisions in day-to-day matters.

Finally, I experience for the first time in my life, a level of bodily calm and okay-ness on a day-to-day basis. I feel well in my body. A new experience from the hypervigilant and hyperalert self that never ever rested or relaxed fully.

Sakshi-Bhav has offered a shift in how I engaged with my inner world as well as the interpersonal field. The sentinels helped build capacity for a presence that is non-reactive and spacious. This witnessing stance did not negate emotion nor action, but allowed for clear-seeing. With clarity, many right actions become possible.

How important are they (these roles) within me.

I thank you dear reader for travelling with me on this journey of role-transformation 🙏.

Bibliography/Appendix

1. Herb Proper's short informal piece on Roles, reproduced below:

**Role Theory: practical notes on defining & understanding any given role;
an introduction to the key elements to use in understanding and working with roles:**

[N.B. these are used on my various **Role Inventory forms**; they are also the framework that I use in defining, or characterizing roles in psychodrama sessions. The order in which the elements are presented below is only for the sake of explanation. In any given practical situation, the exploration of a role through these elements is a spontaneous process, which varies according to each individual case.]

1. naming the role: a noun and 2 or 3 adjectives which express essential qualities of the role. the name of the role is like a "memory tag" that

a. **the noun** indicates the essence of **what the role does**, since roles only exist, i.e. "come alive" or "become present" in action (which can be verbal, non-verbal or both; and which can be internal as well as external)

b. in the case of **social roles** - those roles through which we interact with others/the society around us - there is a general shape to the role given by the society & culture, plus the individual variant created by each person; e.g., general elements of the role of student, teacher, doctor, mother/father, son/daughter, various worker, professional roles &c. are given by the society & culture; then individuals develop their own personal variation.

c. **also** roles are typically not constant; they can change & develop or evolve over time. One indicator of mental ill-health is roles which become fixed and do not evolve as one's circumstances change.

2. goals or objectives: what the given role is trying to achieve or accomplish by engaging with another role.

a. it is essential to keep in mind that this particular role is either wanting to or trying to engage another role [this role emerges to try to satisfy an "inner need" of the person (protagonist), OR emerges in response to a particular role presented by another person (**role demand**). in other words, we can say that the role is emerging due to **intrapsychic** factors or to **interpersonal** ones.

b. a key component of the objective(s) is/are **how the role wants another role to feel**. there may also be a concrete outcome intended: **what the role wants another role to do**.

3. tactics (behavioral & emotional): a concrete expression of **what the role is trying to do to another role to obtain the goal/objective**. this also is not easy to characterize or express in words. it is much clearer & easier to see (both for protagonist & the group) in action. N.B.—the example of Dr. Anbu trying to pat the shoulders or rub the shoulders of the client to make the client feel....[what? more peaceful? more confident?.....e.g. **naming the objective**].

similar roles in different persons, even if they have very similar objective, may often use very different tactics to try to achieve them.

the key element in role interactions is that **Role A is trying to get an objective. the role may not always succeed.** this determines the emotional outcome of the action.

4. **the complimentary role.** without another role to engage, a role remains in potential.....it is not “alive” or “present”. the role also has **a particular other role —the compliment—with which it would most like to engage. that will produce a satisfying interaction for the role.** if the role is presented with, or has to engage with a different role, it will generally not have as satisfying experience——producing some degree of frustration, anger, sadness or other unpleasant emotion.

5. role encounters can be either **interpersonal** (with a role of another individual) or **intrapsychic** (2 roles of the same person).